ROC Project: Evaluation Report
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This is a summary report on the main findings from an evaluation of the ROC project located in Glasgow which was produced in 2004.

Introduction

Background
The phenomenon of young runaways in the UK was explored in Still Running published in 1999. This work was extended – specifically with reference to young runaways in Scotland – in Missing Out (2001). A representative sample of over 3000 young people in six areas of the country were surveyed to look at the prevalence of running away under the age of 16. Interviews were also conducted with workers from more than 40 agencies involved with runaways and with 37 young people who had substantial experience of running away. Missing Out revealed that:

- one in nine young people would run away or be forced out of their home overnight before the age of 16
- 6000-7000 children under 16 would run away for the first time each year
- most runaways were only away once or twice, but a quarter had run away three times or more
- over half of those who had run away more than three times had first run away before the age of 11.

In the Missing Out study, young people reported that they had run away primarily due to problems at home, often combined with personal problems and difficulties at school. They said that there was a lack of information on the services available to them in their locality, that they would welcome advice, counselling and family mediation services – plus, in some cases, alternative (temporary) accommodation.

Increased awareness and concern about young runaways led to the establishment of The ROC Project in Glasgow by Aberlour which began in 2000. ROC was set up in part as a Police Misper scheme – a key referral route would be directly from the Police when a young person was reported missing by her or his parents or carers. However, there was an intention that over time, as the profile of the project increased across the city, other referral routes would become active including via teachers, social workers and Childline Scotland workers. A further aspiration – that self-referral by young people would increasingly be a factor – was also put forward.

ROC took its first referrals in November 2001 – the more formalised Misper scheme first produced referrals in March 2002. As part of extending its direct work with young runaways the project
developed other preventative and supportive strands of practice. ROC extended its work to cover young people’s mental health issues. It piloted work with young people in local authority substitute care who might be at risk of running away, undertook educational work within local schools and cultivated a programme of group work activities. During 2003 funding was obtained for a residential refuge – opened in July 2004 – which offered three beds to young people who could not return home.

**The evaluation study**

This evaluation was part of a wider study of project work with young runaways. The Safe on the Streets evaluation was undertaken between 2001-2002. It was originally conceived to look at the practice of The Children’s Society projects who were establishing programmes of work with young runaways. The Aberlour Trust negotiated the inclusion of the ROC project in the study. The Safe on the Streets evaluation offered a comprehensive consideration of how projects access, engage and work with young runaways. It incorporated two main elements:

- A **monitoring system** which covered the lifespan of a case, from referral to end of contact.
- A set of **case studies**, designed to more closely consider the process of direct work by canvassing the thoughts of all parties to each case at a number of points in time.

Five young people were recruited for case studies during the Safe on the Streets evaluation. Data collection for the evaluation of the ROC project was extended beyond the end of 2002. Five additional case studies were undertaken between April and August 2003 and monitoring information was recorded until May 2004. In total this study looked at the monitoring data from 129 young people referred to the project during the period and at the in-depth material from ten case studies.

**Research aims**

The aims of the evaluation were:
- To look at who the ROC project worked with.
- To consider how the project worked with these young people.
- To scrutinise the outcomes of the work done.

The following presents the key findings from the evaluation report

**Monitoring Data: Facts, Figures and Analysis**

The monitoring data showed that ROC had been particularly successful in:
• making the project equally accessible to young people of both sexes
• reaching repeat runaways – those who had run persistently prior to first contact with the project.

It was suggested that the following issues may need further consideration in the future:

• Although there had been a reasonable level of work done with younger (under 11-year-old) runaways, there appeared to be a lack of Misper referrals from the police in relation to this age-group.
• The project had worked with few young people from ethnic minority backgrounds. This may have been affected by the relatively small ethnic minority population in Glasgow and by the lower proportion of young people from these communities to run away.
• The lack of contacts with runaways who had only gone missing once or twice meant that the project may not have been intervening early in the potential running away career of some young people.

The majority of the young people who ROC worked with had prior involvement with other agencies, mostly the Social Work Department. From the data on referral sources it appeared that routes to the main agencies were working well and that there was a healthy relationship with schools – with many teachers making direct referrals. The low level of self-referral was indicative of the relative infancy of the project.

The project undertook direct work with over three quarters of the young people referred and mostly the work lasted for a substantial period of time – in a third of cases at least six months. The work was often intense with large numbers of face-to-face and telephone contacts with young people and frequent liaison with other professionals and with parents. This was indicative of the complexity of the issues that needed to be addressed in many of the cases.

The young people with whom ROC worked had many significant problems. Most prevalent were:

• school attendance / exclusion issues
• being the victim of various forms of abuse – especially ‘emotional abuse’
• misuse of alcohol, drugs or other substances.
The young people’s parents often had problems too – especially with mental health and conflict issues.

The individual outcomes achieved were relative to the circumstances of each young person – but in most cases where there was a substantive intervention there were positive outcomes. More generally it was often recorded that young people had higher self esteem and sense of self worth after the intervention and were, thereby, better equipped to deal with problems in the future.

**Case Studies: Major themes**
A number of themes resonated across the case studies and therefore were seen to be illustrative of the situations of many young people who become involved in longer-term work with runaways projects such as ROC.

- School problems were prevalent – especially difficulties with the transition to secondary school and with being bullied. However, it was suggested that this was partly due to the culture within secondary schools – with behaviour being differently labelled and responded to than it might have been in a primary setting. Running away and problems at school were both found to be indicative of more deep-rooted issues for the young people.
- Many of the young people were living in socially deprived conditions – their homes were in areas where they were not safe on the streets, where they were vulnerable to violence or the threat of it, to becoming involved in risky behaviour (substance misuse or offending) and many were party to these issues within their own families.
- Parental problems were common amongst this group. Many were of a serious nature – domestic violence, mental health problems, drug and alcohol addiction, were present in the households of a number of the young people who were interviewed. And, even in those homes where there was not such difficult overt parental problems, there was often a certain degree of need in the parent / key carer. Most were struggling with their parenting role in some way and required support from the project workers (support that the project was not especially equipped to providing).

The project’s core practice philosophy – young person centeredness was found to be beneficial to practice but could also present some difficulties for project workers, young people and other agencies in the course of a piece of work.
Case Studies: case management and complex cases
In terms of longer-term casework it appeared that positive outcomes with young people occurred more often where there was stability present particularly in terms of the domestic context. Thus, it was suggested that core stability may be a key factor in promoting positive outcomes in longer-term cases.

It was found that the increasing complexity of the situation could be handled in different ways by staff, leading to different outcomes. It was suggested that there may be a need to carefully look at the role of the project worker as it develops in these more difficult cases.

Overall it was found that the promotion of young person centeredness in the long term in more complex cases could mean the compromising of young person centeredness in the short term, and the ability to handle this complexity rested with the degree of sophistication shown in the project worker’s approach to casework.

It was suggested that staff need to acknowledge that other parties often hold the real power to control what will actually happen to the young person and that, in order to manipulate this in the young person’s interests, it may be necessary to have a sufficiently strong relationship with these other parties to convince them of the merits of the young person’s view. The project worker’s sophistication in practice would lie in her or his ability to convince the young person of the need to build these other relationships in the short term so that in the longer term she / he can use them to put the young person’s perspective at centre stage. As without this degree of sophistication in a complex case, the young person may not see positive change and may lose motivation and disengage.

Conclusion
An overarching theme that arose in the study was the huge complexity of problems that young people could bring to the project. It was argued that it was a testament to the workers that they had often managed to deal with this and work towards good outcomes – often despite a lack of available, appropriate services to link the young person in to for ongoing support.

It was clear that the young person-centred approach was very effective in building trusting and productive relationships with vulnerable and socially excluded young people. It also offers them a feeling of self worth and efficacy, over time contributing to increased resilience. At the core of this approach was the project’s much-valued independence from the statutory sector. This appeared to be a vital element in creating trust with young people –
facilitated by a comprehensive confidentiality policy which meant young people knew that personal information would only be shared with other professionals in exceptional circumstances. However, the downside of this was that project workers lacked the statutory authority to make fundamental decisions in complex cases. This could be a hindrance to achieving change in the direction that the project worker and young person might prefer. It was argued that ‘steering’ the work may rest on the project worker’s ability to skilfully manipulate key relationships.

As a possible way forward, the cultivation of ‘project champions’ – professionals, preferably relatively senior managers in other key organisations – who were fully informed and supportive of an independent project was suggested as this had been found to be a useful additional tool by others. Strategic relationships could be built with these individuals, possibly through networking, but perhaps more usefully by inviting them to join the project steering group (which then facilitates regular and ongoing contact). It was suggested that the value of fostering these relationships with pro-project managers in other organisations could:

- offer an added dimension in terms of positive ‘public relations’ at the heart of their agency, cascading information on to a wider spread of colleagues
- boost the number of referrals
- act as advocates for the project
- counter resistance from within other organisations
- offer insight into how other organisations work
- have useful input into how the runaways project develops
- intervene directly in the decision-making process relating to individual cases
- revise policy in the light of issues exposed by runaways project work.

The degree to which all these functions can be performed will be linked to the relative authority of the professional involved – so it would be important to work with the right people. Establishing and sustaining these links could be a challenging and time-consuming task – but a vital one.

The report concludes that the benefits of cultivating project champions could ultimately be far-reaching – leading to positive changes for both individuals and for wider systems. The potential to invoke such significant outcomes should be a strong incentive to all runaways’ projects to establish and sustain close and effective relationships with key players in the wider professional community.
References
